WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An isolated DNA comprising nucleotides encoding a KCNQ5 protein.

2. The DNA of claim 1 comprising nucleotides encoding a polypeptide having the amino acid sequence SEQ.ID.NO.:3.

3. The DNA of claim 1 comprising a nucleotide sequence selected from the group consisting of: SEQ.ID.NO.:1, SEQ.ID.NO.:2, and positions 138-2,675 of SEQ.ID.NO.:2.

4. An isolated DNA that hybridizes under stringent conditions to a nucleotide sequence selected from the group consisting of: SEQ.ID.NO.:1 and SEQ.ID.NO.:2.

5. An expression vector comprising the DNA of claim 1.

6. A recombinant host cell comprising the DNA of claim 1.

7. An isolated KCNQ5 protein.

8. The KCNQ5 protein of claim 7 having the amino acid sequence SEQ.ID.NO.: 3.

9. The KCNQ5 protein of claim 8 containing a single amino acid substitution.

10. The KCNQ5 protein of claim 8 containing two or more amino acid substitutions where the amino acid substitutions do not occur in a position where the amino acid substituted in KCNQ5 is also present in the corresponding position of any one of KCNQ2, KCNQ3, or KCNQ4.

11. An antibody that binds specifically to a KCNQ5 protein where the KCNQ5 protein has the amino acid sequence SEQ.ID.NO.:3.

12. A method of diagnosing whether a patient has Stargardt-like macular dystrophy, cone-rod dystrophy, Salla disease, or age-related macular degeneration that comprises determining the DNA sequence of a region of the KCNQ5 gene from the patient and comparing that sequence to the sequence from the corresponding region of the KCNQ5 gene from a non-affected person, *i.e.*, a person who does not have Stargardt-like macular dystrophy, cone-rod dystrophy, Salla disease, or age-related macular degeneration, where a difference in sequence between the DNA sequence of the KCNQ5 gene from the patient and the DNA sequence of the KCNQ5 gene from the non-affected person indicates that the patient has Stargardt-like macular dystrophy, cone-rod dystrophy, Salla disease, or age-related macular degeneration.

13. A method of diagnosing whether a patient carries a mutation in the KCNQ5 gene that comprises:

(a) providing a DNA sample from the patient;

(b) providing a set of PCR primers based upon SEQ.ID.NO.:1 or SEQ.ID.NO.:2;

(c) performing PCR on the DNA sample to produce a PCR fragment from the patient;

(d) determining the nucleotide sequence of the PCR fragment from the patient;

(e) comparing the nucleotide sequence of the PCR fragment from the patient with the nucleotide sequence of SEQ.ID.NO.:1 or SEQ.ID.NO.:2;

where a difference between the nucleotide sequence of the PCR fragment from the patient with the nucleotide sequence of SEQ.ID.NO.:1 or SEQ.ID.NO.:2 indicates that the patient carries a mutation in the KCNQ5 gene.

14. The method of claim 13 where the DNA sample is genomic DNA.

15. The method of claim 13 where the DNA sample is cDNA.

16. A DNA or RNA oligonucleotide probe comprising at least 18 contiguous nucleotides of at least one of a sequence selected from the group consisting of: SEQ.ID.NO.:1 and SEQ.ID.NO.:2.

17. A method for determining whether a substance is an activator or an inhibitor of a KCNQ5 protein or a mutant KCNQ5 protein comprising:

(a) recombinantly expressing KCNQ5 protein or mutant KCNQ5 protein in a host cell;

(b) measuring the biological activity of KCNQ5 protein or mutant KCNQ5 protein in the presence and in the absence of a substance suspected of being an activator or an inhibitor of KCNQ5 protein or mutant KCNQ5 protein;

where a change in the biological activity of the KCNQ5 protein or the mutant KCNQ5 protein in the presence as compared to the absence of the substance indicates that the substance is an activator or an inhibitor of KCNQ5 protein or mutant KCNQ5 protein.

18. A method of identifying inhibitors of KCNQ5 comprising:

(a) expressing KCNQ5 protein in *Xenopus* oocytes;

(b) changing the transmembrane potential of the oocytes in the presence and the absence of a substance suspected of being an inhibitor of KCNQ5;

(c) measuring membrane potassium currents following step (b);

where if the potassium membrane currents measured in step (c) are greater in the absence rather than in the presence of the substance, then the substance is an inhibitor of KCNQ5.

19. A method of identifying activators of KCNQ5 comprising:

(a) providing test cells comprising:

(1) an expression vector that directs the expression of KCNQ5 in the cells;

(2) a first fluorescent dye, where the first dye is bound to one side of the plasma membrane; and

(3) a second fluorescent dye, where the second fluorescent dye is free to shuttle from one face of the plasma membrane to the other face in response to changes in membrane potential;

(b) exposing the test cells to a substance that is suspected of being an activator of KCNQ5;

(c) measuring the amount of fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) in the test cells that have been exposed to the substance;

(d) comparing the amount of FRET exhibited by the test cells that have been exposed to the substance with the amount of FRET exhibited by control cells;

wherein if the amount of FRET exhibited by the test cells is greater than the amount of FRET exhibited by the control cells, the substance is an activator of KCNQ5;

where the control cells are either (1) cells that are essentially the same as the test cells except that they do not comprise at least one of the items listed at (a) (1)-(3) but have been exposed to the substance; or (2) test cells that have not been exposed to the substance.

20. A method of identifying inhibitors of KCNQ5 comprising:

(a) providing test cells comprising:

(1) an expression vector that directs the expression of KCNQ5 in the cells;

(2) a first fluorescent dye, where the first dye is bound to one side of the plasma membrane; and

(3) a second fluorescent dye, where the second fluorescent dye is free to shuttle from one face of the plasma membrane to the other face in response to changes in membrane potential;

(b) exposing the test cells to a substance that is suspected of being an inhibitor of KCNQ5;

(c) measuring the amount of fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) in the test cells that have been exposed to the substance;

(d) comparing the amount of FRET exhibited by the test cells that have been exposed to the substance with the amount of FRET exhibited by control cells;

wherein if the amount of FRET exhibited by the test cells is less than the amount of FRET exhibited by the control cells, the substance is an inhibitor of KCNQ5;

where the control cells are either (1) cells that are essentially the same as the test cells except that they do not comprise at least one of the items listed at (a) (1)-(3) but have been exposed to the substance; or (2) test cells that have not been exposed to the substance.

21. A method of treating Stargardt-like macular dystrophy, cone-rod dystrophy, Salla disease, age-related macular degeneration, other forms of macular degeneration, deafness, epilepsy, different forms of neuropsychiatric, heart, gastrointestinal, and muscle disorders by administering to a patient a therapeutically effective amount of a substance that is an activator or an inhibitor of a voltage-gated potassium channel containing the KCNQ5 protein.